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Concepts of Wicca

Written in 1988 -- Disseminate freely

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The elements/concepts of Witchcraft or Wicca that I've roughly dissected out below should be interweaved in order to form a whole. Keep in mind that there may well be variances on the "specifics" mentioned. This began life as a series of mail messages on CompuServe.

-The balancing of the individual is seen as a part of the balancing of the world that surrounds the individual. A sense of balance is also relevant to a Pagan or Wiccan approach to the environment. People, ideally, are seen as being in balance between two or more outwardly-antithetical aspects. These aspects (ie night and day; generous & stingy, etc.) are not really antithetical -- each, as exemplified in the symbology of yin/yang, contains elements of the other. Individuals learn to explore their own particular balance, and try to harmonize and deal with things which may be out of kilter. (Being in balance doesn't mean being static, or stuck right in the middle, either. People are expected to evolve, albeit at their own pace and general direction.) Because of this approach, shades of grey are important.

-The microcosm = the macrocosm. A very important concept. This is one which allows us to see that concepts such as the balance between night and day, for instance, may have value in our own lives. Wicca is a religion rife with symbolism. (Words are symbols, themselves.) On other levels, this expression means that what goes on in the world around us affects us; and what we do affects it.

-The concept of God/Goddess(es): Deity is seen as immanent, a part of the here-and now; not transcendent (as in other-worldly). God/dess(es) is seen in every tree, leaf, star, planet, person and animal. Wiccans walk in balance with nature and the world for this reason. (Some don't see God/dess(es) in man-made objects like skyscrapers -- I disagree.) A reading of Jung will help one understand the important archetypal aspects we find in Deity. Individual Gods are expressed in many aspects -- they are seldom if ever fully omnipotent (usually an unimportant concept for Wiccans) and seldom aloof to our concerns. They may have lessons to teach and not all lessons are sweetness and light. ("Beware of asking for Wisdom -- you may get it.") The feminine aspect(s) of Deity are very important in all perspectives. While some groups do not consider the masculine aspects of Deity to be important, many of us give respect to all faces of Deity.

-Grounding and centering. Grounding is a way of "channelling" energy flow back into the Earth, much as a lightning rod dispells electricity. These concepts are more than semantics -- they are very useful in dealing with stress, as well as occurences which may be considered more "metaphysical" than physical. As for centering:

-Centering: It is that which, while drawing upon the pathways and energies one uses to deal with the world, is the face one presents to one's Inner Self and to Deity (God/dess(es)). Centering, from a purely physical approach, involves finding one's center of gravity. Centering, from a mental approach, involves finding one's center of awareness -- perhaps synthesizing the right-brain/left-brain dicotomy in thought. Centering, from an emotional approach, involves finding the central point(s) of one's emotional balance (refer back to the Concept of Balance). And centering, from the spiritual angle, involves finding the center of that interconnecting web which makes up a person's whole being -- right where it intersects with Deity. This sort of Centering involves finding the "rightness" of Deity --it is a place where it does not matter at all if Goddess is "merely" an archetype or if Goddess really and tangibly exists --(YES on both counts!) This sort of Centering involves being fully aware of both self and Deity in a manner which is terribly hard to put into adequate words. No, it does not seem to be something which people can be constantly aware of every moment of their waking lives (at least not to its fullest extent) --but it is something that a trained (and sometimes an untrained) person can reach into or call upon, when needed. It is more than a tool to contact Deity. It is more than a tool, period, although this Centering is useful as such, when working to develop the spiritual aspects of self.

-"An it harm none, Do what thou Wilt" -- the Wiccan Rede. This is more than an excuse for licence. It contains several concepts discussed below (ethics, Will, among others).

-Ethics: Not seen as being imposed from "outside", from external dogma. They are integral, however, because they are based on common sense and respect for others (see microcosm = macrocosm), including the environment around us. Ethics respects the need for others to make their own choices in life, though we may provide guidance. Ethics means not hurting others unnecessarily, or for what we percieve as "their own good". The Golden Rule applies. Manipulative, cohersive magic has no part to play in a responsible, respectful approach to the Craft.

-Will: The concept of doing YOUR magical "Will" involves finding out exactly what it is -- one of the things Wiccan exercises help for. Just any passing fancy is not necessarily your "Will". Needing to dominate or decide for others is also not, in this sense, an expression of Will. Many times, what may be mistaken for Will turns out to be in actuality a knee-jerk counterreaction to something (for instance, a vengeful counterreaction). In one important sense, however, Will is finding that thing (or things); that mode of being, which "centers" you -- and living it.

-The loss of a sense of guilt: A sense of guilt implies being made to feel blame for something within. Guilt tends to be self-generated, although one's environment may magnify a disposition to it. The ideal is that we should live a guilt-free life -- but as with all things in human nature, people often end up feeling guilty over feeling guilty, which doesn't address the issue. (There should be no "shoulds" in the Craft -- Did you catch that??) Therefore, accepting that one may feel guilt can be important, in order to work through it. A Wiccan works to know who he or she _is_ -- and, once knowing, needs no guilt to justify staying on the "straight and narrow". However, besides our recognition of ideals, in a practical sense we must recognize and understand the existence of guilty feelings. Guilt is not seen as a method for control within the Craft. You don't do something just to assauge it -- rather, you try to understand its roots and deal with that. There is no "original sin" in this religion.

-An acceptance of magic: In the most metaphorical sense, this is a belief that one can transform and be transformed. That one's own actions and the help of the energies one can call upon for aid -- whether they be seen by the individual as gods, goddesses, unnamed forces of nature, elemental energies, personal inner fields of strength, archetypes, or etc. -- can result in the transformation of either the self or the macrocosm at large (Wiccans are their own priests and priestesses in this regard.)

-Dedication -- there is a sense of internal goal-setting. Things don't all come easy, and the barriers along the way can be learned from -- indeed, it is important to do so. The Wiccan is dedicated both to her personal growth, and in co-operation with others, to the goals of the coven (if he/she is IN a coven), which she quite often has input in creating and developing. Mutual and uncohersed cooperation is an ideal signpost of whatever goals the Wiccan seeks to acheive. A corollary to this aspect of Wicca is a developing sense of responsibility. This responsibility taps in in a living mode to the other concepts of Witchcraft I have mentioned, as well as in to our day-to-day "mundane" dealings with people. No, we can't make ourselves responsible for everything that happens (that way lies burn-out), but we do aim to invoke responsibility in a balanced, loving, and intelligent manner (which may differ from person to person).

-Caring, support, love. Self-explanatory, I hope. These are the underpinnings of what we hope to achieve. Without these, the rest is just hollow form.

-Karma: At its worst, a "it happened, so you must have gotten what you deserved" reaction is no better than a New Age substitute for guilt, and is a terrible attitude. At its best, karma is a realization that no action occurs in a vacuum, that "what goes around comes around". Karmic action need not be seen as a simple one-on-one action/re-action. Nor is every sickness or unpleasant thing that happens to us a karmic debt we are paying off.

-Purpose: Many Witches feel that they are embued with a sense of purpose. This purpose, for which they are here/doing what they are doing/ etc., differs for different Wiccans. This idea relates to the concept of involvement with and in this world. As has been noted, Eastern philosophies tend to study many of the same things as do we -- but Wicca is more western-oriented in that it finds an active role and a sense of involvement in the material plane for its participants. Witchcraft is not as detached in focus. This idea of a purpose for existence in the here and now is very integral. Often I have run into Wiccans who have quite evidently found their purpose or purposes -- at other times Wiccans feel strongly aware that they do have a special purpose they are here to achieve -- they just haven't figured out quite what it is, yet. (As well as there being a mixture of both types of awarenesses in some Wiccans, also!)

-As Wicca is a religion based on the here and now, a concept similar to the Christian Heaven is not utilized. What Wiccans believe happens after death varies quite markedly among individuals. Some believe in reincarnation, feeling that they may come back in future lives after a visit to a Summerland in order to learn from the mistakes they made in this life. In other words, they will come back to work through the karma of past lives. Others, on another hand, are quite content to deal with karma as a concept with relevance to this life only -- in such a case, karma is not as heavily a controlling factor in the circumstances of their existence (ie, then in such cases it obviously doesn't determine one's birth circumstances); although the idea, as I have expressed it before, that nothing occurs in a vacuum, still holds sway. There are those who do not expressly believe in reincarnation. I for one do not expressly believe in it (but I don't fully disbelieve it, either!). I do think some part of my life force or energy continues on, but probably not in a form that I could strictly call "Me". This is why I think the things I do in this life are terribly important, and it works, for me.

-"Blessed Be": We are all blessed. The "Be" signifies action here; it is not a passive condition. We are blessed, and we walk in sacred space. Here and now. It becomes a matter of growing aware of it.

-Cycles; the concept of the Circle: The circle is a metaphor for all kinds of things. There is the moon cycle, the cycle of night and day, the life cycle. Cycles meet together to form the spiral of the "Spiral Dance" (Starhawk's book title). The elements form a circle/cycle. Refer back to the concept of the microcosm = the macrocosm. One can pinpoint cycles in one's own life. And, as in the concept of balance, this is also an evolving idea, not a static one.

-Truth: There are many paths to Truth. There may or may not be one ultimate Truth out there, but whatever the case, it is seen by the Wiccan as being approachable by the routes laid open by many choices. This doesn't mean that there is no such thing as a wrong choice; it does mean that two people can find Truth by markedly different paths. (And if Capital T Truth is seen as one ultimate Truth, this doesn't mean that there aren't a whole slew of small t truths out there.) In the same way, we acknowledge that perception determines how we view reality; and hence, how we view those truths when we come upon them. The perception hurdle is out there for everyone -- it is how we deal with it on our searchings for Truth. As a corollary, it must be mentioned here that relativism when applied to ideas and ideals doesn't necessarily mean that every idea or ideal is equal to every other idea/ideal. They aren't.

-Perfect Love and Perfect Trust: This is the relationship between the Wiccan and the concept of God/dess(es). You can concieve of it for simplicity's sake as an ultimate form of Centering (see above).

-Keep in mind that the rules in Wicca are internal -- they are not dogma per se, imposed from outside. This is by and large an experiential religion -- although we do have some structure (some groups or traditions within Wicca more so than others). Rules that certain groups or traditions may encourage often have to do with 1) maintaining group identities (which can also help foster a sense of "familial" community -- important for growth as a group), 2) maintaining ethical standards (which will ideally come from within -- if you don't want to live it, it will be difficult for you to bridge that "psychic" gap that should connect you with the group, among other things) and 3) other practical considerations. Those sorts of expectations are not to be seen as restricting -- and if a seeker finds them constricting within a specific group, my advice is to look towards another group with another (perhaps more congenial) approach, or to practice solitary. Contrarywise, some people need or want a more structured approach. Not everyone looks for or needs the same type of environment to grow, even within the Craft -- that's why we've got the diversity we've got.

-Symbols: While external symbols are hardly as important as that which one finds in the heart, one sometimes-misinterpreted symbol is the pentagram, either standing alone or drawn within a circle. It may be interpreted as a representation of the five elements (earth, air, fire, water, ether/spirit), or as a representation of Man. Another oft-misrepresented symbol is the athame, which is a tool used by many Witches as a representation of the sharpness of Will (see above) which may be dedicated as a tool of Fire (energy) or as a tool of Air (intellect), depending upon the system used.

Blessed Be!

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